

# The Library Assistant:

*The Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians.*

No. 928.

NOVEMBER, 1925.

*Published Monthly.*

## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Editorials and Announcements ... ..	221
The Judging of Books. By H. M. Tomlinson ... ..	224
The Divisions ... ..	235
Books of the Month ... ..	237
Correspondence ... ..	239

## EDITORIALS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The **Next Meeting** of the Association will be held at 7.30 p.m. on *Wednesday, November 18th*, in the *Public Library, Bethnal Green Gardens*, Cambridge Road, Bethnal Green, through the kindness of the Borough Librarian, J. Radcliffe, Esq. *Mr. F. S. Smith*, Chief Assistant at the Library, will read a paper on "*Criticism*." The Chair will be taken by the President, *Mr. H. A. Sharp*, Deputy Librarian, Croydon Public Libraries.

The Library will be open for inspection from 6.30 p.m., at which hour *Mr. J. Riches*, of Croydon, will read to the Junior Section a paper on "*Library Topics*." Refreshments will be provided at 7 p.m. through the generosity of *Mr. Radcliffe* and the Library Staff.

The Bethnal Green Gardens adjoin the eastern end of Bethnal Green Road, *via* which it can be reached by a 1d. fare stage from Bishopsgate on buses Nos. 8, 60 and 160. Bus No. 42 and Tramcars Nos. 53 and 71 pass the Gardens from Aldgate East and other District Railway stations.

**Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux.**—The Conference which was opened by *Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, Bt.*, Minister of Labour, at Balliol College, Oxford, and lasted from September 25th to 28th, was a distinct success. Over 200 delegates from scientific societies, research libraries, and institutes attended. Both Europe and the United States were well represented. Extended reports have already appeared in the Press, so there is no need for us to retell the story of the Conference, save in one particular. Arising out of the Conference an attempt is to be made to explore the possibility of closer relations between the A.S.L.I.B. and the Library Association. The objects of both associations are at bottom, the same, so that anything that will lead to closer co-operation and avoidance of overlapping is to be encouraged.

**Public Libraries.**—From the *Daily Chronicle* we extract the following :—

“The great error, which most public library authorities made in the beginning, was to suppose that all which a library needed was books. They grossly underpaid their librarians, with the frequent result that those engaged were not good enough; they stinted all the material conveniences of the premises, which in consequence were barren of educational value. These mistakes have in some degree been seen and rectified. But it remains the case that most library authorities would get better results if they spent more money, not on books, but on the machinery through which the books are to reach the public—that is, on their librarians’ salaries and on developing better types of premises.”

In other words, a collection of books in a cellar is a dead thing. To make it a living force it requires a congenial home and a librarian capable of making its resources available for all. Whilst capability cannot be measured in terms of money, most people are convinced that a good article costs more than an inferior one.

The **Next Meeting of the Council** will be held at the National Library for the Blind on Wednesday, November 25th, at 7.30 p.m.

Our **President** (Mr. H. A. Sharp) has been appointed an examiner in Library Routine (Section 6) of the Library Association Examinations, and our Hon. Secretary (Mr. G. P. Jones) has been elected Chairman of the Membership Committee of the Library Association for the third successive year.

**The A. A. L. Dance.**—The splendid floor of the lecture hall of the Islington Central Library, presented quite an animated scene on Wednesday, October 1st, when the first dance of the season was held. In spite of very inclement weather about 80 members and friends assembled and passed a very pleasant evening.

Godfrey’s Orchestra maintained their reputation for keeping things going, and once again Mr. G. D. A. Colebourne journeyed from Battersea to officiate as Honorary M.C. To him and to Mr. W. J. Harris, for his practical courtesy in placing the splendid hall at our disposal, our best thanks must be tendered.

**Library Association Examinations** will be held during the week commencing 7th December, 1925.

**The Inaugural Meeting** of the 31st session of our Association was held at Chelsea on October 14th, the proceedings beginning with an afternoon ramble through the old streets, each replete with artistic and literary connections, under the able guidance of Mr. J. H. Quinn, the Borough Librarian, assisted by the Sub-Librarian, Mr. A. Denton. We feel it but right to express regret that so few

members turned up in the afternoon, and wonder whether London members *can* have noted the announcement in last month's journal. Mr. Quinn, who appeared surprised at the smallness of the party, stated that had he known how few were coming, he would have arranged a visit to a local studio, a rare treat in such a neighbourhood.

We were shown the art treasures exhibited in the special room at the Library: water-colours by local artists, including a charming sketch by Whistler who spent many years of his life in Chelsea, and did much of his finest work there; statues and a death-mask of Thomas Carlyle, with autograph letters both of himself and Mrs. Carlyle in abundance; portraits of Sir Thomas More, Sir Hans Sloane, and, in fact mementoes of most of the old Chelsea worthies. Then followed a stroll through Studio-land to Cheyne Walk, practically every other house we passed bearing the L.C.C. plate of a former distinguished inhabitant, until the Old Parish Church was reached. The interior of the Church, delightfully quaint and old-fashioned with its ancient roof, fading monuments and beautiful windows, is little changed from the time when Sir Thomas More and his numerous family, accompanied by perchance Hans Holbein, knelt in worship there. We saw chained books—the *Vinegar Bible*, the *Homilies*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*—behind iron bars to prevent curious hands from spoiling their crumbling bindings! These were the gift of Sir Hans Sloane, who, with his gracious Lady, rests under an elaborate and sumptuous monument. Whether the body of Sir Thomas More lies in the family vault cannot be ascertained with certainty, but we have it on Mr. Quinn's authority that his head—More's—was taken to St. Dunstan's, Canterbury, where it reposed in a niche for a considerable time! Having duly whispered a prayer for the souls of the departed great ones, and dropped our contribution into the Preservation of the Building box, we made for Crosby Hall—a magnificent example of a town residence of the 15th Century, which was removed bodily during recent years from Bishopsgate and re-erected along the Chelsea Embankment by an eminent architect. The Hall, with its mighty fireplace, lofty carved roof and rich tapestries, struck us as an inspiring instance of the workmanship of the Middle Ages.

Tea at the Polytechnic followed when a score of us did our best to dispose of goodly viands—prominent among which were piles of Chelsea buns—provided for a hundred! Then we filed into the Children's Lecture Hall to listen to the Inaugural Address of Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, which appears elsewhere in this issue. By this time it was pleasing to note that the audience had swelled in numbers, and all parts of London appeared to be represented more or less adequately. A spirited discussion followed the many interesting points raised by the speaker, and we noted as prominent participants, Messrs. R. D. H. Smith, of Richmond—now happily recovered from his illness, R. Wright of Wandsworth, who appears temporarily to

have deserted Dell for Hull ! W. H. Parker of Hackney, full to overflowing of the Epstein question, and J. G. O'Leary, brief but cheery—sorry, quite unintentional !

The thanks of the meeting were accorded Mr. Tomlinson on the motion of Mr. G. F. Vale of Bethnal Green, who was supported by Mr. F. E. Sandry, of West Ham. Those who heard Mr. Tomlinson will, we are sure, remember his address because of its sincerity, honesty, and sound commonsense. It was a difficult and argumentative subject handled in a masterly manner. Most of our readers know Mr. Quinn, and there can be no gainsaying the fact that his arrangements contributed largely to the success of this meeting. Along with his capable deputy, Mr. Denton, he laid himself out to do his best—and succeeded. Messrs. Parker and Wright were responsible for putting in motion the thanks of the meeting to these two gentlemen, and, needless to say, it was carried with acclamation. What we may remember most of Mr. Quinn's several interesting remarks in the course of the day, was a cleverly told anecdote—against himself—connected with Epstein, which may have been in the nature of a retort to the very characteristic story recounted by Mr. Tomlinson about Conrad and reviewing !

P. W. H.

**Work of the Council**—As is so usual with Council Meetings held prior to meetings of the Association there was a tendency to restrict deliberations at the October Council Meeting to matters of routine. Mr. Quinn had very kindly granted us the use of his office and Mr. Parker took the chair in the absence of the President.

Committee reports contained nothing out of the way, although several matters of interest were promised for the next meeting.

### THE JUDGING OF BOOKS.\*

By H. M. TOMLINSON.

When I was invited to address an assembly of the custodians of libraries, I happened to glance at a book-shelf of my own, and saw there, in the following disorder : Smith's Classical Dictionary, Thomas Dekker's "The Wonderfull Yeaere," Butler's "Unconscious Memory," "Robinson Crusoe," Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," Meredith's "Poems," Washington Irving's "Voyages of the Companions of Columbus," Chanter's "Lundy Island," Parry's "Third Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage"; and so on. You will have noticed that it is impossible to make the wildest guess at the next book on that shelf ; and a reasonable guess could be made if I were a good librarian. I know nothing of Librarianship, and I think I have proved it. So why am I here ? The generous supposition is that I should at least know something of the judging of books, for I have been paid to criticize them.

\* Address delivered at the Inaugural Meeting at Chelsea, 14th October, 1925.

One ought to know the job one is paid to perform, and the rules of that particular task should be of some interest to busy librarians, among whose many duties is the spending of public money on new books. How are you to know that you are spending that money to the best advantage? Without doubt you have your own standards. If you had the time to examine all the new novels, there would be fewer mistakes on your shelves; but you must die some day, and there is much else to do. You must trust, therefore, I imagine, largely to the criticism in the press. Can you trust it? That is the question which you would like me, as a pressman, to answer, and I gladly do so. You can't. Your duties as librarians, spending public money that the light of the mind should be at your call for any citizen who applies to you for it, are more onerous than you know. Very much that is published is rubbish, and a little of it is poisonous. I mean by rubbish the mass production of standardized fiction, the derivative and expensive biographies of ladies who were gay, but are dead, and who, from our reading of history, are better dead; not a little of the feverish expositions of that political economy which some men prefer to other systems; and some of the books of travel, which are usually very dear, and give us nothing but misconceptions lightheartedly; their photographs are the best of them. But your own purchases, prompted by press criticisms, will tell you what I mean. As to the poisonous books, what constitutes poison depends on temperament, as well as on acquired taste, so we had better say nothing about it.

Let me remind you of the press criticisms of Mr. Wells' latest novel, "Christina Alberta's Father." One critic was sure that, if Mr. Wells had omitted Christina, it would have been a fine book; another thought the whole thing was spoiled by the father; and yet another decided that, if only Mr. Wells could have excluded himself from his own industry, then his work would have been the better for it. What are we to make of it? Only this: that literary criticism is mainly a matter of opinion, and is no more absolute than is one's taste in tobacco.

A mathematician might be able to say to what he hoped his calculations would lead him; a biologist might make a plausible show at explaining the nature of life; a musical critic, may be, could tell us wherein resides in harmonics the profoundly disturbing nature of some music. But as to the judging of books, all I know is that I have had money for it, and—if you will not let it go any further—it has been nothing but my own views of things. Opinions vary, even about truth itself, as the debates in the House of Commons prove. They vary remarkably, even in a group of sincere people, and that is why there is as much confidence shown about literature as there is about God; about God, however, we often feel we are free to have a private opinion. We do not care what the parson thinks. But concerning literature we are more diffident; we are inclined, if good

readers, to defer to authority, and by authority I mean anyone who is sufficiently well-read, has singular confidence in his own good taste, and is agile in his apologetics. Who is, in fact, well armed and formidable. Some critics, amongst them the Countess of Oxford, have felt that in "If Winter Comes," there is something to remind them of the sublime tragedy in the Four Gospels; others have felt a desire, equally sincere, to throw the book down violently. How reconcile, scientifically, so striking a difference in the emotions provoked by but one literary document? I think we had better make up our minds that these phenomena can never be reduced to formulas. Human nature, even the nature of a learned critic among his volumes, is more varied, more elusive, than we are assured are the principles of genetics.

The literary critics, we will further remember, have produced a library, part of which explains that Hamlet was mad, and part that he was wonderfully sane. They have also discovered recently to their great surprise, what some of you may have suspected all along, that Keats did more in 23 years than others have done with longer opportunities. I would not say that I attach no value to literary criticism for sometimes I enjoy it, and what we enjoy must be more or less right, of course. Among the moderns, we would not omit to read anything Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch or Professor Saintsbury has to say about books.

But here is a puzzle I should like to commend to genuine critics of reading matter. Its solution would interest me more than a dozen new volumes on Shakespeare. A publisher's reader told me that he bought the copyright of a certain novel, which had had little success in its 7s. 6d. form, for a modest sum. He thought the risk was fair. Within a few weeks of its re-issue as a cheaper book, that novel occupied the full capacity of several great printing works. They could not produce enough of it. The publisher's reader thought I ought to be able to explain this unexpected success. The scientific explanation would mean money to him and to me. The story concerned the abduction of an English girl by an Arab—she made, of course, a plausible show at resistance—and the Arab removed her to idleness in luxury under the palms. I ventured to hint that poor folk, whose instinctive desires are like those of the rich, but who are confined to a routine of typewriters and tea and buns, and a train home again, nevertheless must live somehow. Therefore, compelled by our moral conventions, they live also a dream life apart, to which imaginary dark chieftains offer savage but happy release. This explanation, however, the publisher did not wholly accept. There were, he told me, similar novels on the market at the same time, with Arabs, abductions, and palms all complete, but very little happened to them. Moreover, the publisher went on, this same Arab, when he got to America, went past all his swarthy and handsome rivals, and had exceptionally good luck.

Now, will some critic explain why? A sufficient explanation would be a genuine addition to knowledge. The critics who know why Shakespeare did this and that, who can guess the springs of *his* activities, surely ought not to find the shy little creature who sits in all our tea-shops so utterly beyond them. But they never so much as glance at such questions. Yet obviously the secret that Arab unlocked here, the secret which his rivals knew nothing about, was the one he unlocked in America. In what remote recesses of the human heart is it hidden, and what does it look like? It is easy to speculate on the problem of style. Everybody does it, who touches books. That is like discussing the mystery of immortality. The evidence may be chosen according to desire, and what does not assort with our predilections may be ruled out, quite reasonably, as irrelevant. But what I want to see are exact reasons for the joy some folk show over reading matter which to me looks ugly and deplorable. And so do you.

There may be absolute criteria for the judging of books, but I do not know them, and cannot submit any. A learned critic may somehow manage to convey the impression that, like a chemist, he has an array of apparatus of which every item has its designed purpose, and that his measuring is done by impersonal scales which never fail to distinguish the just from the unjust. Yet we need not believe him, unless we want to.

But I should be sorry if you thought I decried good taste, and think it unimportant; or that good taste may be got like any other pleasing commodity, and added, if necessary, to reduce the asperities of a compound of scholarship. Good taste is our taste; or how should we know that it is good?

Yet, what is it? That is the puzzle we are here to examine, but shall not solve. Let us suppose—for there is no reason why all illusions should do us harm—that good taste gets its value from those clouds of glory which, so Wordsworth assures us, we brought with us. We are not—some of us are not—entirely forgetful.

We had better not suppose that good taste in books is something the children may acquire at school, if they are diligent; or that anyone may cultivate it, as a hobby. It does not come with industry, like success in commerce. Yet I am sure that it might be more general than it is. I have noticed that children, by no means clever, who have had easy access to such books as the Bible, the Iliad and the Odyssey, to Dickens, to Bunyan, Defoe, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, and others you here could easily name, and have not been ordered to read them, but have been casually induced to find treasure there: who have heard read aloud some of the greater passages of the best that man has done, such children, with a free run on all sorts of new volumes in later years, show a native distaste for shoddy, and a ready detection of the insincere and pretentious. I am inclined to think here is nothing much more valuable in the public library near my



own home than its carefully selected library in a room for children, where the readers may take what they want, sit among those of their own age, and have the kindly direction of a skilled attendant by asking for it. It is possible to induce in the young the faith that in books they may find happy reflections of truth, which they may know by their beauty. For, even if we know of no absolute criteria for the judging of literature, or of any art apart from its technicalities, we need make no mistake about one thing. Art certainly is not, as some commentators would have us to believe, a choice and decorative thing set apart for the privileged who have been initiated into its mysteries, as though it were like the cunning collecting of old French clocks or Chinese snuff bottles. For my part, if Literature is not a flowering of life, just as is any rose, then it is no better than any other indoor game. It is not something ornamental to be added to the house when business improves and leisure is won. Literature and religion have so much in common that, for my part, I find it impossible to separate the works of Isaiah and Swift. There is a passion for truth in these religious and writing fanatics, a terrible zeal, which puts upon what they do the sign of beauty. Some folk prefer to call it the love of God.

What, you expostulate, is the judging of books as vague as that ? Is that what you call exact guidance ?

I do. What more could we have ? I am convinced that the man who sins against the light ; who is a time-server, and prefers comfortable obscurity with a bucket over his light, and thus recognises things as they are, in the long run gets the lie in the soul so much at home that he cannot even tell a good book from a bad one. After all, the light is not without its uses. In our search for realities we omit it at our peril . . . I will refer to some current art criticism in the press to show what I mean by the lie in the soul, and what that lie will do for us. You have all heard of the Hudson Memorial in Hyde Park ; the noise in the Press over it has been like the din of a riot. A deplorable uproar, for I was aware that some of the more violent press critics of Epstein—for whom I hold no brief—had never read "Green Mansions," did not know anything of Rima, and so did not understand Epstein's problem. Let us remember that nothing so quickly arouses the coarse derision, and even the anger of barbarians, as what is beautiful. They will even take pleasure in destroying it. They don't like it, for it makes possible an unfortunate comparison. If that is right, then what are they ? And here I would ask you : Did you hear of any attack in the popular press on the Edith Cavell memorial ? That exhibit stands, as you know, alongside our national collection of art. When foreigners visit us, Londoners cannot escape their critical eyes. There our testimony to Edith Cavell, that noble woman, stands. Now, in what I shall say I shall not criticize the work of its artist, but those who should cherish the memory of Edith Cavell. There is a lion on that memorial, associated with the Cross. You may resolve that association



as you please, but to me something about it seems rather odd. You have not forgotten, of course, that loveable woman's last words. She was about to die, and she rose then, as a great soul, above the battle ; in which we still were heated and violent. " I find," she said in that moment, " I find that patriotism is not enough." Is it credible that we could allow her monument to stand there, with lions and crosses about it, but with the truth omitted, that truth she left for us just as she went out to die ? It is. It was omitted for some years, and was inserted recently under protest ; and the press, which now finds so horrible Epstein's conception of an image in a romance, said never a word.

Now we will return to Rima. I do not think there is much to be said about the Hudson Memorial either way. It is a worthy tribute to a poet, and open to criticism, of course ; but the memorial was obviously designed to be overshadowed by trees, and to have the reflections from the fountain before it playing over its surface, that the austerity of Rima in white marble should be softened. Rima was a spirit ; and it is not easy to render a spirit in stone, and, maybe, it is impossible. As you leave Epstein's attempt to render it, come out of Hyde Park by St. George's Hospital. There you will find a gigantic bronze figure of a youth with only a fig leaf and a huge sword, and may wonder what it is. Well, it pretends to be a tribute to the men of the Machine Gun Corps, who died in the war. But on its pedestal you may read these words : " Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." The fig-leaf is a silly evasion and a snigger. David was not an hermaphrodite, nor was any machine gunner that I have met. That inscription, however, proves the inhumanity, the essential ugliness, of the whole conception. For it is not at all a tribute to the men who fell. It is the deification of Carnage. It is a tribute, not to the poor machine gunners who died, but to the Machine Gun itself. The inscription might just as well have been in German, for certainly most of our own men were slain by the German David. There that testimony, an unconscious falsity in itself, as its inscription shows, stands to Moloch, and not far from Westminster Abbey. But they who have been so outraged by Epstein's conception of a phantom in a book, a book some of them have not read, appear to be unable to discern that mockery in bronze, in central London too, of the sacrifice of the boys we lost. If you want to know what can happen when, with a lie poisoning the mind, we judge a book or a work of art, there it is. Studious nicety can be shown over the adjustment of a fig-leaf. The harshness of Rima's marble breasts can be most unladylike. But the triumph of a brute god over the young who perished can pass unnoted.

Is that unimportant ? To me it is the choice between life and death ; no less. If we can find no precise rules for the judging of literature, we see, nevertheless, that on our choice a very great deal depends.

We may, and without knowing what we do, deny the light. We may hail for our choice, and again without knowing what we do, Barabbas. For we may be always quite sure that the choice of Barabbas is a sincere choice, and entirely the consequence of a genuine and heartfelt preference. And, we can be always quite sure that for us to challenge such a choice will prompt reasonable and even righteous indignation. For can it be doubted that an instinctive desire, once it is rationalized, is no longer a desire at all, but an intellectual conception worthy of reasonable men? Well, we never doubt it in the heat of the argument.

The judging of books may be all that to you and to me. But we will not deceive ourselves. For it is a fact that you may say just what you like about literature, and yet never raise that intensity of joy or resentment which might come of hinting that a famous politician had spoken favourably of tinned tomatoes while knowing in his dark heart he preferred them fresh. You may, as a literary critic and in a responsible paper, couple the last popular novel of Miss Jones with Hardy's "Tess," and even hint to Hardy that time flies, and the young have all their life before them; and yet the chances are your host of silent readers will fancy there is something shrewd and clever behind such a remark. One feels too sorry to laugh over it. It is funny, we know, to see a dignified fellow-creature go down on a banana skin. But if such an accident were to be witnessed at all hours of the day in any street, we might begin to feel at last that some control should be exercised over the banana skins of the irresponsible. Yet consider the happy abandon with which slippery stuff about books is thrown about nowadays for the unwary—how wonderful is the literature that is issued every week—how great the novels of Miss Jones—how majestic the prose style of Mr. Churchill, and the poetic genius of Mr. Potts! Can it all be true? But if it is ridiculous, as no doubt it is, does it really matter, some may ask? Not you librarians, of course, you will not ask that, for you must surely suffer through such criticism.

Of course such bad and indifferent criticism of books is of serious concern, like bad drains. Of course it is important, for at least frivolity appears unseemly, and carelessness something worse, about the springs of life and death. Though it may be largely true that our literary criteria are only our personal prejudices elegantly disguised in reasonable argument, yet one does see errors in criticism which ought not to be made by any one who knows a book from a toast-rack. I remember noting, in one important London newspaper, that a certain popular novelist's prose style, though admittedly bad, must be quite all right after all, for was not the prose style of Carlyle also ugly? I gathered that it was the *matter* of a book that was of importance, and not the style.

I must say that any press critic who makes such a fundamental mistake as that ought to be sacked instantly. The style of "Past and

Present " ugly, and not beautiful, though it so perfectly embodies its noble purpose ! Was there ever a good book with a bad style, or an attractive flower with a disgusting smell, or an honest politician with a dishonest soul ? Such fallacies are by no means unimportant, even though our literary standards are only our personal preferences. Commonly held, they may prove of no less consequence than the cheerful faith that war is inevitable, that all men are liars, that statesmen are great, that self-preservation is the first law of nature, and the other phrases, freely advertised, which we use because they are handy and we cannot be bothered to think them over.

The little things matter, even in books. They are significant. Even the style matters. For style is not ornamentation, nor even, as some people think, when they remember Lamb and Sir Thomas Browne, useless ornamentation. Only a bad style can come of artful deliberation, as Oscar Wilde and others have shown. Style depends, first and last, on what a writer has to say, and the kind of man he is. It is not his dress, but the essential man, the man even his friends may not know. And yet, you have seen, there are, among those critics to whom you librarians must often go for guidance, some who suppose that a good book can still be ugly—that is to say, that a bad book can be a good one. You may complain, as a correspondent did once, to a paper for which I was writing, that these are but personal views, as in fact I have confessed, and not *objective* criticism. I wish I knew how to recognize objective criticism, but I fear it is like the objective and fabulous monsters seen when our minds are not quite right ; we think it is there, but it is not. That is the reason why there is no perfect and objective style, and no absolute and impersonal criteria by which literature can be judged as a thing in itself. Good style is more than the use of the right words in the right order, if by right words we mean technical exactitude, and not that indefinable appeal which is in the form, color, and poise of a daffodil when the light favours it.

But, while warning you that you had better depend on your own judgment, and not on published reviews, when buying books out of public funds, let me put in a plea for the unfortunate reviewer. It is but fair to him to say that he is scandalously underpaid. His is the worst rewarded job on the press. No intelligent advertisement canvasser—and they are all very acute—would change places with a reviewer of books. Naturally, it follows that the best reviewers, who themselves would be good writers, prefer to get their bread in some other way ; if they can find another way, that is. Some years ago, when visiting Conrad, I noticed in a corner of his room a stack of brown paper parcels. Several of the parcels had their wrappers torn, and I could see they held books. I recognized some recent publications, and was indiscreet enough to look closer. The great man, a model of courtesy, patience, modesty, hospitality, and other gentle

virtues, seeing my curiosity, dropped his monocle from his eye, fluttered his hands before him, raised them, clenched them, beat them down, and stepped closer to me with his face thrust forward and tense with annoyance. Though obviously trying to say something, he failed, because his sudden emotion had choked his utterance. Luckily, I could see it was the parcels he hated, and not me. I waited calmly for his words to burst, for clearly I was no more responsible for those parcels than for the day of the month.

"Why do they do it?" at last he demanded. "You're a newspaper man. Why do they do it? Is it done to annoy me?" I took these words of his, and other fragmentary exclamations, assembled them with that ready improvisation towards a hidden meaning which a journalist at length acquires; for not infrequently he has to settle the doom of nations on the back of an hotel bill, having no more writing paper handy; and so I concluded hastily that one of the many newspapers with the largest circulation had sent all this mass of new publications to the famous man for him to review. Indeed, at last Conrad said so. It agitated him like an unremitting leak in a water-pipe which he did not know how to stop. It appears that at first the parcels came unannounced. They kept coming; Conrad thereupon demanded to know why this mistake was continued. Then he was informed that he was supposed to review them. Somewhere, no doubt, a news-editor, prompt and clever, but lacking in judgment, and without that knowledge of letters which is so hard to acquire in the hurry of modern journalism, had noticed that Conrad was famous, and that there were books to review. It gave that news-editor an immediate conjunction of irrelevant ideas—one of those curious associations which at times do supply a newspaper with some of its most popular features. Hence, the parcels. The great man said to me: "What shall I do with the damned things?"

A question of closer pertinence than he knew, for he was addressing a reviewer; but an unanswerable question. Perhaps in ignoring them he was doing the best thing possible; for the art of reviewing, as we hurried writers must practise it, is one of the many idle occupations in a society which has developed an excess of such means for tapping ready nutriment out of essential wealth and labour. Yet even the reviewer of books, it ought to be pointed out, though his work is not so dreadful as that of the gatherer of samphire, often has a wretched time of it, creaking and groaning, rusty-minded, through the latest gritty volume, urged to such a task by rent and taxes, and a hypothetical public alleged to be anxious to know whether he can endure the thing or not; the dog the new book is tried on.

That, of course, you know, or can easily guess; for you know what most of the new books are like. But what you want me to tell you is of a touchstone by which, independent of the reviews, you may know whether an author deserves, at the public expense, to be placed where readers may have access to what light he brings.

And I am here to tell you that you must depend on yourselves. For whether you regard the perfunctory but laudatory reviews of new novels which flow through the press like a chant of unvarying praise, or whether you turn to the scholarly and patient examination by fastidious intellectuals, which are occasionally to be found, you may be, nevertheless, just as unguided or misguided. I will, to conclude, recall a review which one fastidious intellectual, who shall be nameless, but who is really a scholar, wrote of another excellent and more *humane* critic of letters, when the latter had just published a book of essays. The review appeared in the "Athenaeum."

He began his serious assault on his contemporary by a reference to a third critic, Mr. Arnold Bennett, who, he alleged, said once of a fourth critic, named Matthew Arnold, that he, Matthew, might have been a great critic, with study and discipline. But the critic in the "Athenaeum" said that to him it seemed but a superstition to suppose that Matthew Arnold, by study and discipline, could have been a great critic. For my part, I hazard no guess. I have told you that I have no ambition in this matter of literary criticism; but I do submit that it is only comic insolence to suggest that what Matthew Arnold lacked—though we may be sure he lacked something—was the discipline of study. I mention this because, from the rest of the review, I gathered that a critic should never begin a criticism by making strange faces and funny noises in order to gain attention. He must be, as this serious critic explained, *serious*.

"What is the matter with the criticism we get?" asked this critic of letters. And then he went on to say that that was the "inquest" to which the review of the poor book was going to take him. The inquest! He made it clear throughout his review that it was a post-mortem inquest he was conducting. He was overhauling a dead body in the damp silence of a morgue for the seat and origin of the taint which needed a skilled dissector like himself, just before the undertaker's arrival. But though my own literary criticism is infrequent and amateurish, I think the trouble with criticism in England, of the *intellectual* kind, might have been seen fairly soon by this scholarly critic if he had kept his eye on his own word—"inquest"—till he saw daylight through it. Yet how often in this life, when looking for the truth, may we not stare at the simple, familiar, but unrecognized light itself, without knowing it; and so continue our drudgery, through two more columns, or a few more years, when a touch of alert humour at the right moment would have saved us.

There is no joy in an inquest. And there is no understanding of literature which is not won with joy.

The deep gravity of this critic became like dull lead because the author of the book of essays he was reviewing was never quite serious. But living men, who are enjoying their work, and are trying to sustain in us a cheerful faith in the living world, keep their thought

in the open as much as is possible. One does not go to the mortuary sooner than is necessary. Yet worse than his cheerfulness, this essayist, it appeared from his scholarly critic, was unable to treat a book "austerely by criteria of art and of art alone."

Let us ask each other a few questions. What are "the criteria of art and of art alone?" What is art, anyhow? Was Tolstoy right? or Walter Pater? Or did this learned critic really know? Is it likely that Shakespeare had read Aristotle's "Poetics"? or the advice of Longinus on the Sublime? Or did Whitman feed himself thus? And supposing both those poets had been so careful, would the advice of Aristotle have made any difference to "Macbeth," or "Leaves of Grass"?

Our critic went on to declare that what a *great* critic requires is "analysis and comparison methodically, with sensitiveness, intelligence, curiosity, intensity of passion, and infinite knowledge." The request for infinite knowledge was a happy last thought. Perhaps, in view of that demand, the Deity might prove a good reviewer. As to comparison, I suppose he meant that mass of examples which would at last crush with conviction the densest mental timber. Yet what writer worth the name writes anything without compensating it instinctively with comparative reference to all his experience of life and letters? I suppose a book—what all good people would agree to call a book—is sublimated personality. Using, without taking much thought of it, all the knowledge that was added to his mother's milk, a poet proceeds to express his mind, without consciously doing that, either, in describing the world as it appears to him. And if another man chooses to occupy himself later in describing the mental complexes of the first, and calls it literary criticism, then it is a highly interesting pursuit, and may, if well done, improve the heart and understanding of many people; but they who engage in that kind of by-play cannot dress like serious priests, and pretend to be performing sacred rites, without causing a little amusement. Literary criticism, I fear, springs from temperament as much as from knowledge. Just like the books with which it deals, it comes out of the nature and the circumstances of the beast. It is nearly all opinion; and a little of the opinion may be accepted by succeeding generations, and so get fixed as a sort of law, till some stout man comes along to play puff-ball with it. To talk of the criteria of art and of art alone is like seriously intoning the Abracadabra of the Absolute. There will be no such literary criticism till the Last Day, when the Book of Doom is opened.

You librarians, however, cannot wait for that. Your desks will be besieged to-morrow morning by folk eager for a little light before that last great illumination comes. And you must supply that glim. It has been my purpose to suggest to you that your office, which has taken the place of the pulpit, and has in it the power to correct the worst offences of the popular press, and many other of the evils from

which we suffer, your office, I assure you, must supply its own light. I cannot help you, nor any other author and critic. I think, in fact, we must look to you for aid.

## THE DIVISIONS.

### MIDLAND DIVISION.

The Annual Meeting of the Division was held in Birmingham on Wednesday, October 7th. After tea at the Council House Canteen, the business meeting was held at the Birmingham Reference Library, by kind permission of Walter Powell, Esq., Chief Librarian.

The Annual Report was read, and on the motion of Mr. H. M. Cashmore, seconded by Mr. Woods, was unanimously adopted.

The Treasurer presented the Annual Statement of Accounts, the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Patrick, seconded by Mr. Lindsay, and approved.

The Chairman announced the election of Officers and Committee for the ensuing year as follows:—

*Chairman.*—Mr. G. L. Burton (Sparkhill, Birmingham).

*Hon. Secretary.*—Mr. V. Woods.

*Hon. Treasurer.*—Miss M. G. Baker.

*Hon. Auditor.*—Mr. H. Goodall.

The Committee were appointed as follows: Miss Atherton, and Messrs. Cashmore, Chubb, Woodbine, Patrick and Sargeant.

Mr. Chubb then vacated the Chair in favour of Mr. G. L. Burton, who proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the retiring Chairman, and on behalf of the Division presented Mr. Chubb with a writing desk, as a token of the good wishes of the members on the occasion of his marriage which took place earlier in the year. Mr. Chubb very suitably replied.

The Chairman then announced that the educational classes would be held from October to May. The classes formed were:—

Routine, conducted by Mr. F. Chubb.

Cataloguing, conducted by Mr. Patrick.

Bibliography, conducted by Mr. Woodbine.

A special Social Committee was also elected, with a view of taking in hand all activities of a social character, such as the Summer Meeting, Theatre Parties, Rambles, etc. The following members were elected to serve on the special Committee: The Misses Atherton, Hardy, Paterson, Proctor, and E. Weston, and Messrs. Hunt and Lindsay, together with the Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer, *ex officio*.

After the ordinary business had been disposed of, two very interesting papers were read, one on "The Reference Library, from a junior assistant's point of view," by Miss C. Dallison (Birmingham Reference Library), the other on "The Lending Library from a junior assistant's point of view," by Miss B. W. Cowdy (Small Heath, Birmingham).

The Meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the readers of the papers.  
G. L. B.

### NORTH-WESTERN DIVISION.

The Annual Meeting of the Division was held in Liverpool, on Wednesday, 7th October, 1925. Members and friends from Manchester, Liverpool, Stockport, Cheshire, Rochdale, Blackburn, Bolton, Bootle, Birkenhead, Warrington, Crewe, etc., met in the Hugh Frederick Hornby Library, Reference Library,



Liverpool. A motor omnibus then conveyed the party to the printing works of Messrs. C. Tinling and Co., Ltd., at Prescott. Here the craft of the modern printer with all its intricate machinery could be seen. The processes from the setting up of the type by the monotype to the large press which prints both sides of the paper at once, contained many surprises and formed a great contribution to our knowledge of modern book production.

Coloured work by the three and five colour processes was seen, and included such intimate objects as book-jackets for works by Zane Grey. The section including the work of folding, sewing, and casing was inspected, but time was all too short to give them the attention that our interest merited. A vote of thanks to the proprietors was proposed and seconded by Mr. R. Cochran and Mr. J. Stephens.

Boarding the bus again the next stop was the Derby Arms, Halewood, where the Liverpool Branch entertained the visitors to tea, and a sumptuous feast it was. Thus fortified, the party returned to the Hornby Library, for the evening meeting.

Mr. G. R. Axon, the retiring President, was in the Chair. The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed, the annual report adopted, and the following officers elected.

*President.*—Mr. W. A. Phillips (Liverpool).

*Vice-President.*—Mr. H. Fostall (Manchester).

*Hon. Treasurer.*—Mr. H. Hamer (Bolton).

*Hon. Secretary.*—Mr. W. Threlfall (Stockport).

*Council.*—(Bolton Branch): Miss D. McClardy, Mr. G. R. Axon, Mr. W. G. Fry, Mr. T. L. Yates, Mr. H. Hamer, Mr. J. Hindle, Mr. T. Noble.

(Liverpool Branch): Miss A. M. Travis, B.A., Miss D. Yates, Miss E. O. Rothwell, Mr. F. J. Boardman, Mr. B. Claussen, Mr. G. C. Meakin, Mr. E. C. Wickens, Mr. R. C. Cochran.

The new President (Mr. W. A. Phillips) was then called upon to take the Chair and to deliver his Presidential address on "The Librarian's Need: Courage."

At the close of the lecture a vote of thanks to the President was enthusiastically adopted. Hearty votes of thanks were also accorded to the retiring President for his splendid services of the past twelve months; to the Liverpool Branch for the entertainment; and to the Libraries Committee and Mr. G. T. Shaw, M.A., (Chief Librarian), for their kind permission to allow us the use of the Hornby Library. This concluded the meeting.

WM. THRELFALL, *Hon. Secretary.*

#### SOUTH COAST DIVISION: WESTERN SECTION.

A meeting of the Western Section was held at Bournemouth on Wednesday, 14th October, 1925. The party was a large one, consisting of members from Portsmouth, Southampton, Brighton, the Bournemouth staff, and friends from Poole.

At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Riddle, who occupied the chair, welcomed the visitors very warmly and pointed out the features of Bournemouth and its libraries, specially drawing attention to the collection of books on music and the charming room in which it is housed. This library, Mr. Riddle said, is unique in the country. Mr. Riddle then had to vacate the chair, as he had to attend another appointment and the Vice-Chairman of the Bournemouth Libraries Committee, Councillor Empson, occupied it in his stead. Councillor Empson then welcomed the visitors and remarked that such meetings

were guarantee for the assistants' enthusiasm, and that it pleased him to see such keenness which some years ago, when he first became interested in public libraries, was nowhere apparent. He was followed by Councillor Whitfield, M.A., Dr. Penrose and Councillor Brazier who, in turn, welcomed the gathering.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. James Hutt, M.A., the Chairman of the Libraries Committee, Mr. Ralph Smythe; the Rev. Dr. Jones; Sir Daniel Morris, and Councillors Roff and Harris.

Mr. Cooper (Portsmouth), was called upon to read a paper entitled, "Reading and the personal element," which was followed by discussion, the following taking part: Councillors Empson and Whitfield; Messrs. Webb and Male, and Misses Lea, Bennett and Richards.

A visit to the publishing offices of the "Bournemouth Daily Echo" followed; Mr. Fairburn of this paper conducting the party. This proved immensely interesting.

Tea, by invitation of the Libraries Committee, was a happy affair. Mr. Webb, moved a hearty vote of thanks to the Committee; Mr. Riddle and the staff, which was seconded by Mr. Male, to which Mr. Whiting and Councillor Summerbee replied.

FRANCIS J. COOPER, *Hon. Secretary.*

17th October, 1925.

### BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

Mr. Tomlinson in the course of his address, mentioned with sorrow, that one might end a review of a modern novel by comparing "Miss Jones" with Hardy, to the detriment of Hardy, and yet cause no great stir.

Unfortunately for us, and for all interested in letters, this is, without doubt, perfectly true. We must admit that the reading public, and, generally speaking, most of those who are interested in books, is an inarticulate body of people. A very good instance of this is the attack which Sir Edmund Gosse made on the literary pretensions of the English people, in a letter to "The Times Literary Supplement" a few weeks ago. With the exception of two or three offended book-sellers, which class he particularly attacked, no one even took the trouble to reply. And just as Mr. Tomlinson was grievously disappointed that he could stir no interest in his ludicrous comparison between Hardy and his imaginary modern novelist, so am I similarly disappointed over the results of my contribution under the heading of "Books of the Month," which has now been appearing since February. The lack of interest in books which was so much deplored in a paper read before this Association on "A Knowledge of Books," is still apparent in both assistants and librarians. During the whole time that the lists have appeared there has never been expressed a single opinion with regard to the merit of the books selected, neither has there been any criticism, destructive or constructive. Seeing that these lists are based on my own personal opinion one would imagine that there would be quite a lot of noise made over the inclusion of

some, and the exclusion of others, assuming, of course, that there was any real interest shewn in the matter. The one bit of criticism that I have had, is that perhaps the lists were a little too "highbrow," and having thought over the matter, I am willing to agree that I may have been rather too exclusive. As to the question of "highbrow" literature, I will not attempt to discuss that; we have still to wait for a satisfactory definition of that much abused term which is to-day so freely used, and so little understood. When I set out on my task in February last, I said then that it was an almost impossible one, and that I should be open to endless criticism. Well, I haven't been exactly bombarded up to now, so these lists must be either so perfect as to please everyone, or so useless as to interest no one.

It will be remembered that the idea originally was to draw the attention of assistants to books which, in the course of their routine, they would miss, and that, therefore, obvious books however good, would not be included. Since, however, considering the criticism, I have come to the conclusion that at any rate as far as the average assistant is concerned, there is no such thing as a book being too obvious to place in this list. I have recently questioned three apparently intelligent assistants as to the last three books of Conrad, Locke, and Wells, respectively, with deplorable results. Therefore, in view of the charge of being "highbrow," and of this recent experience, I shall endeavour to make the selection a wider, if not a wiser one, and hope that by this means it will be of still more use in helping our assistants and I might add librarians also, to obtain that knowledge of books which is so desirable.

Bell (A. F. G.), *Ed.* The Oxford Book of Portuguese Verse.  
(Oxford Univ. Pr., 8/6.)

An admirable selection of Portuguese poetry of the past eight centuries.

Benson (Stella). The Little World. (Macmillan, 8/6.)  
Travel sketches portrayed with infinite charm..

Brontë (Charlotte). The Twelve Adventurers.  
(Hodder & Stoughton, 12/6.)

Twelve fragments written between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, and most of them now printed for the first time.

Bullett (Gerald). The Baker's Cart : short stories. (Lane, 7/6.)

Conrad (Joseph). Suspense : a novel. (Dent, 7/6.)  
Conrad's last novel, which was left unfinished when he died.

Garnett (David). The Sailor's Return : a novel.  
(Chatto & Windus, 6/-.)

Gosse (Sir Edmund). Silhouettes : essays. (Heinemann, 8/6.)  
A selection of the well known reviews which appeared in the *Sunday Times*.

- Grey (Viscount). *Twenty-five Years, 1892-1916.* 2 v.  
(Hodder & Stoughton, 42/-.)  
A notable contribution to modern history. Especially valuable for the light it throws on the problems arising out of the European War.
- Huxley (Aldous). *Along the Road: notes and essays of a tourist.*  
(Chatto & Windus, 7/6.)
- Locke (W. J.). *The Great Pandolfo: a novel.* (Lane, 7/6.)
- Masefield (John). *The Trial of Jesus: a play.* (Heinemann, 6/-.)
- Roget (P. M.). *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases.*  
(Longmans, 7/6.)  
No assistant can be unaware of this standard work of reference. The new edition has been entirely revised and enlarged.
- Squire (J. C.), *Ed. The Comic Muse: an anthology of humorous verse.* (Collins, 6/-.)
- Wells (H. G.). *Christina Alberta's Father: a novel.* (Cape, 7/6.)  
G. F. VALE.

---

#### NEW MEMBERS.

**Associate:** Miss Barnes (Battersea).

**Members:** Messrs. H. C. Tompkins (Hornsey), W. R. Leggatt (Dorset County); Miss E. Skilling (Belfast); Misses L. Bennett, E. Bowman, P. G. Carter, L. East, R. McFarlane, M. Merrick, M. Tedbury, J. Woodger (Islington); Edward A. F. Keen (Islington).

**MIDLAND DIVISION.—Associates:** Misses C. M. Carpenter, B. E. Edinborough, S. Thompson (Birmingham), Miss E. E. Roberts (Kidderminster). **Members:** T. C. Kemp and W. Cope (Birmingham).

**NORTH EASTERN DIVISION.—Misses** L. R. Holman (Middlesborough), A. Johnson (Darlington), E. Pearson (Newcastle).

**NORTH WESTERN DIVISION.—Miss** C. Smith (Manchester).

---

#### CORRESPONDENCE.

*To the Editor of THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.*

*October 19th, 1925.*

DEAR SIR,

Your prophetic contributor, "H. S." in the October issue of the "Library Assistant," who, it seems to me, is rather inclined to let his vivid imagination run away with him, finished up his account of the Conference by saying, as he himself confesses, boldly, "we are on the eve of great events." We are! Bradford has just advertised for a Chief Librarian at the magnificent salary of £500 per annum, so this is apparently a forerunner. Probably something to get on with, something to encourage the younger brethren. In another paragraph our "Old Moore" darkly hints that "much will happen in the near future." Quite blood curdling, isn't it? Just like the good old Lyceum drama. Well, if Bradford is the forerunner, we've got nothing to be very cheerful about. According to the "Municipal Year Book," "Bradford is a city of

which the country is proud. Intellectual development of the community is provided for in 29 public libraries," etc. Bradford has a population of 291,100. The libraries have a stock of 234,077 volumes; the last return shews an annual issue of 1,492,124, and 30,695 borrowers, whilst the total number of staff employed is 75.

Yet all that this great city, which surely should be one of the plums of the profession, can offer us is £500 per annum. What is the cause of this disgraceful and totally inadequate salary; Bradford has been an institute member of the Library Association since 1894, and its present Librarian, who was elected a Fellow in 1885, was for some years a member of the Council of the Association.

It is therefore quite evident that the Library Association stands for nothing in these matters, and yet the British Medical Association insists that a town of 120,000 inhabitants shall pay its M. O. H. a salary of £1,100 per annum. I know the old argument will be forthcoming, "Ah, but doctors are indispensable"; although if the B. M. A. had been as inactive in the past as the Library Association is to-day, the doctors would still be on a level with the barbers as they were not so very many years ago.

Bradford may be proud of its intellectual development, but it will never be able to boast of the salary it pays to the one who has so much to do with it, namely, the Chief Librarian.

P. U. O.

---

#### APPOINTMENT.

Cocks, Miss W. A., to be Assistant, Wood Green Public Library.

---

### BOROUGH OF CAMBERWELL.

#### PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

THE Camberwell Borough Council invite applications for an ASSISTANT in the Camberwell Public Libraries.

Experience in the general work of a Public Library is essential. The person appointed must have a thorough knowledge of the work of Juvenile Departments, and must be able to take charge of such Departments if so required.

The appointment will be subject to the conditions of the Council's Staff Scheme, and to the provisions of the Camberwell Superannuation Act, 1908. The successful candidate will be required to pass a satisfactory medical examination, and will be placed in Class II. of the Council's Scheme at a commencing salary of £85 per annum, rising by annual increments of £7 10s., and one of £5 to £150 per annum, such salary being subject to the addition of bonus on the Civil Service scale. The present bonus on £85 being at the rate of £63 15s. per annum.

Applications, which must be made on forms to be obtained from the undersigned (if by post, stamped addressed envelope to be enclosed) together with copies of not more than three testimonials, must be delivered at the Town Hall, not later than 12 noon on the Monday, 16th November, 1925.

Personal canvassing will be a disqualification.

C. E. NEWTON,  
Town Clerk.

Town Hall,  
Camberwell, S.E.5.  
October, 1925.